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THE PRESENT CONDITION OF SOME OF THE BIRD ROOKERIES OF THE GULF COAST OF FLORIDA.*

BY W. E. D. SCOTT.

Third Paper.

FRIDAY, May 21. To-day all the skins that had been collected were laid out to air and dry in the deserted houses of the fish ranch. These ranches, which are used only during a few months in the fall, are frequent on the islands and keys along this part of the Gulf Coast. Sometimes there is but a single building, and again the number of houses, if they may be called houses, amounts to a dozen or even twenty. They are all built of poles and beams, and the entire structure, walls as well as roof, is thatched with palmetto leaves. They afford very good shelter and are picturesque to a degree.

The point where we were stopping is known as the Champion Ranch, from the principal schooner which makes this a headquarters during the fishing season.

Shore birds of various kinds, several species of Terns, Laughing Gulls, and White and Brown Pelicans were common at Big Gasparilla Pass, a mile north of the ranch where we had anchored. The American Oyster-catcher (*Hematopus palliatus*) was one of the conspicuous species along the beaches and was

* Concluded from page 22

evidently breeding. Among the Terns I noticed *Sterna maxima*, *S. sandvicensis acuflavida*, *S. forsteri*, *S. hirundo*, *S. antillarum*, and *Hydrochelidon nigra surinamensis*. All of these were abundant save the Cabot's Tern, which was apparently rare, and most of the species, *S. antillarum* excepted, were in flocks and had not begun to breed. *S. hirundo* had, with few exceptions, not completed the moult, and the same observation applies to *S. forsteri*, a large proportion of each species being still in immature or winter plumage, or beginning to assume the breeding dress. Black Skimmers were rather common, in flocks of from twenty to as many as several hundred, and Laughing Gulls were very abundant, in large flocks, and mostly in immature or winter plumage, the birds with black heads being only occasionally seen. I also saw now and again the American Herring Gull, and rather more frequently a Ring-billed Gull (*Larus delawarensis*). Florida Cormorants were uncommon at this point, being mostly at the breeding grounds, and the only Ducks seen were a pair of Florida Ducks (*Anas fulvigula*).

Very large flocks of *Charadrius squatarola* were conspicuous among the beach-birds, and Wilson's Plover was also abundant, and either breeding or about to breed. Here, too, I noticed a considerable number of Roseate Spoonbills (*Ajaja ajaja*). But all the birds, though in such large numbers, were very wild; most of the day was spent in trying to get a White Pelican; three of us tried to stalk the birds, but they were so very wary, having evidently been much hunted, that we not only did not get any but could get no nearer than three hundred yards of them. All the other species were well acquainted with the shotgun and with man, and were as wild and shy as I have ever seen birds anywhere. At night, the skins already taken being well aired and dried, I determined to proceed in the morning to the next pass to the north of this one, namely Little Gasparilla.

Saturday, May 22. Leaving Champion Ranch early, and with a light, fair breeze, we were soon at Little Gasparilla. After an early dinner, leaving Dickinson on the 'Tantalus,' Captain Baker and Wilkerson went with me in the tender to explore the islands and keys of what is known as Kettle Harbor. This locality, once famous as the breeding ground of Herons and kindred birds of the region, is the next large bay north of Charlotte Harbor, and, though not more than four miles wide, is

probably about fifteen miles long, and dotted all over with keys of greater or less extent, some of which seemed to present all the conditions most likely to induce birds to resort to them. But though we carefully explored this entire region, up to Stump Pass and for several miles beyond, we found no inhabited rookery, and saw only a few straggling Herons or an occasional Fishhawk or Kingfisher. At three points we found islands that had been in very recent times the breeding homes of Herons, Pelicans, and Cormorants, but they were absolutely deserted, and not so much as a single pair of Herons or other birds were found breeding at any of these places. Captain Baker had promised to show me a very large rookery on an island near Stump Pass, in this harbor, but on reaching the island we found it deserted, though it had evidently been in comparatively recent years the home of thousands of birds, for the evidences, in the way of excrement and fish skeletons, were to be seen all over the ground, and the old nests were in the trees by thousands. To make sure that birds did not roost here or at the other deserted rookeries in the harbor, we remained at a point where we could command a view of most of the ground until dark, and not a bird came to roost. By this delay we were so late in getting back to the narrow but long strait which connects Kettle Harbor with the waters above Little Gasparilla Pass that we found the tide so low we were obliged to remain in the small boat all night, the shore being nothing but mangrove swamps for a long distance back into the country.

Sunday, May 23. At daylight the tide had risen so that we began to make our way to the 'Tantalus.' In the afternoon we took the 'Tantalus' to another anchorage very close to the Pass, for I had determined to go north again as soon as the weather would permit.

Monday, May 24. The wind being directly ahead to-day and blowing hard, we remained at anchor and explored the neighboring beaches. The Captain found two lots of eggs of the loggerhead turtle on one of the beaches, which had been laid during the night. There were ninety odd eggs in one lot and upward of sixty in the other. Captain Baker told us that the business of hunting the loggerhead turtle for food, and also for the eggs, was carried on mainly during this time of the year, the breeding season, and that the number of turtles had been so

largely reduced in this way that it would be only a short time when it would be almost impossible to find a turtle where, a few years before, they had come to breed by hundreds.

The birds I observed here to-day were much the same as those already mentioned as found at the pass next below, except that Cabot's Tern seemed to be more common, and that during the several days of my stay here the Knot (*Tringa canutus*), the Red-backed Sandpiper (*T. alpina pacifica*), and the Sanderling (*Calidris arenaria*) were migrating north in flocks, which were constantly passing at short intervals throughout the day over the outer beach. Wilson's Plover, Least Terns and Willets were breeding in considerable numbers, especially the two former species, which were to be seen almost everywhere on the sands. The Turnstone (*Strepsilas interpres*) was also migrating north in flocks of from four to twenty and were quite abundant.

About four o'clock this afternoon a 'sharpie' schooner, some forty-five feet in length, came from the direction of Big Gasparilla Pass and anchored within two hundred feet of us. The crew to the number of four at once went on the beach and from the time they landed until dark there was a perfect fusilade. Going over to see what they were doing, I found that they were killing all kinds of shore birds and Least Terns. One of the men told me that this was Mr. Batty's boat, and that they were collecting birds for the 'plume market'; that Mr. Batty was down the beach shooting, and would be back for supper. They had bunches of Wilson's Plover (breeding), Least Terns, and various kinds of Sandpipers. These birds are skinned, partly filled out with cotton, and at once wrapped up in paper and packed away to be finished after reaching the North. They were killing and preparing by these methods, during the time I was near Mr. Batty's party, from a hundred to a hundred and fifty birds a day. I called on Mr. Batty later in the evening and learned something of his work.

Tuesday, May 25. This day was stormy with the wind fresh from the northwest. In the morning I went on the beach with Mr. Batty, and we shot Knots, Black-bellied Sandpipers, Sanderlings, and Turnstones over decoys, all these species being used by Mr. Batty in his feather business. At the same time two of Mr. Batty's men were killing Wilson's Plovers,

Least Terns, Boat-tailed Blackbirds, Gray Kingbirds, and any other small species that came in their way. The Least Terns are particularly in demand in the hat business, and Mr. Batty paid for such small birds as I have enumerated ten or fifteen cents each in the flesh. All Owls, and particularly the Barred Owl, are desirable. The feathers of these, as well as of Hawks, are bleached by processes that Mr. Batty described to me, and used for hats and other decoration. One of Mr. Batty's employes told me that they had left a party at the pass below, where they were killing the same kinds of birds, and that Mr. Batty was constantly purchasing and trading with native and other gunners for plumes and round and flat skins of all the desirable birds of the region. Not less than sixty men were working on the Gulf Coast for Mr. Batty in this way. From time to time, as we were together, I picked up these facts, and I have been careful to underrate rather than overestimate the destruction that was going on from this single source. I have been able, through parties working at various points between here and Cedar Keys, to very fully substantiate these statements.

Wednesday, May 26. This morning we started north again, leaving the party of plume hunters still killing beach birds and Least Terns at Little Gasparilla Pass. We went only a little way outside, as it proved to be very rough, and it was desirable to keep the material thus far collected in as good condition as possible. We went in at Kettle Harbor Pass and up through the same harbor already explored and described, stopping for the afternoon and night at Stump Pass, the upper outlet of Kettle Harbor.

On this beach we again found many eggs of the loggerhead turtle some of which — three or four out of the hundred obtained — had two yolks.

Thursday, May 27. Leaving Stump Pass early this morning with a light head wind, we went sixteen miles up the coast to a point known as Casey's Pass. As we left our anchorage I saw Mr. Batty's schooner headed to the northward, but it did not stop either at Casey's Pass or at Sarasota proper. At Casey's Pass we met a very intelligent man, a Mr. Frank Higel, who told me the same story of the extermination of birds that I had already heard so many times. He said that several years before, when he first came into this region, there were two large rook-

eries of Herons and kindred birds in the little harbor where we were now anchored, but they had been, as he termed it, 'broken up' by the efforts of various plume hunters, and that now it was almost impossible to find any Herons either breeding or roosting in the vicinity. He very kindly described an enormous rookery on the Manatee shore of Tampa Bay, at a point known as Bullfrog River, where he assured me thousands of birds had bred a few seasons before, and I determined to find the point from data and a rough map that he made for me of the region in question. The birds of this pass were about the same as I have already spoken of at Little Gasparilla, except that Knots did not seem so plenty, and Cabot's Tern was much more abundant. Many of these Terns (*S. sandvicensis aculeiflvida*) were observed in what seemed to be winter or immature plumage, and only now and then was an adult bird with a clear black cap observed. There may have been a hundred of this species fishing along the beaches and roosting in flocks on the sand points on either side of the pass. We did not notice any Herons, even at evening, when they are generally to be seen going to roost, though the country back of us seemed particularly adapted for breeding and roosting grounds.

Friday, May 28. It rained all this morning, but in the afternoon it was clear enough to go out on the beaches. Found the Cabot's Tern rather wild, but took nine in the course of the afternoon. Most of these are not in full plumage, but two of them are adult with very black caps and the plumage underneath of a most delicate blush-pink color, very like that seen on the feathers of the breast of the Roseate Tern, and occasionally in a high plumaged Laughing Gull. Here, too, were Forster's Terns in numbers, and *Sterna maxima*. These latter were about to breed, a female taken having eggs with shells almost formed. Some of the Cabot's Terns were moulting. Some of the Least Terns at this point had nests and others had not moulted out of the winter or immature plumage; and of the many *S. hirundo* seen and taken here, very few were in full plumage, most of them being moulting. All of the Forster's Terns were in the 'havelli' plumage, and did not show any signs of moulting. From these data it is not improbable that many of the Terns, especially *S. hirundo* and *S. forsteri*, do not breed till after they are more than a year old; and I am inclined to think that this is also the

case with some of the commoner shore birds, notably *Macrorhamphus griseus* which I have seen in flocks of a dozen or more at John's Pass, on this coast, as late as June 20.

The migration of shore birds to-day was much the same as that noted at Little Gasparilla, Knots, Red-backed Sandpipers, Black-bellied Plovers and Sanderlings still going north in small flocks.

Saturday, May 29. At 10 A.M. to-day, the weather having cleared, we again started north and reached Big Sarasota Pass, where we went inside and anchored for the night. On the way we saw large flocks of Terns and Gulls, and all of the species spoken of above appeared to be quite abundant. This was marked in the case of Cabot's Tern, which was equally common with Forster's Tern. Other birds, such as Brown Pelicans and Man-o'-war Birds, were observed in very small numbers, and all of the species seen were wary and avoided as far as possible the vicinity of our boat. I learned from citizens at Sarasota that the bird rookeries, once so characteristic of the bay, were all deserted by their former occupants, the birds having been pursued without mercy by the plume hunters, and in all the cruising that I did in this bay I found no roosting or breeding places of Herons, Cormorants, or Pelicans.

Sunday, May 30. To-day was spent in cruising the shore of Sarasota Bay, which took all of the forenoon, and in the afternoon we were running up the Manatee shore of Tampa Bay, trying to find the bird rookeries that Mr. Frank Higel had told us of at Casey's Pass. We went along this shore till almost dark, looking carefully for any signs of birds. By half-past five in the afternoon we were some eighteen miles from the mouth of the Manatee River, which we had passed at one o'clock. This was near our objective point, and if the countless birds described by Mr. Higel as formerly breeding in this vicinity were anywhere within five miles of us, I felt pretty confident of seeing some of them going to roost after sundown. As a matter of fact, I did see some half a dozen Herons and about fifty White Ibises, all of them flying so far back into the interior that I lost sight of them. If there was any large rookery on this shore I was unable to find it, though a good part of the morning of the 31st was devoted to a closer inspection, and we used the small boat to go nearer to the shores than we could get in the 'Tantalus.'

Monday, May 31. Spent most of the morning, from daylight until 11 A. M., in exploring the shores in the small boat, and not finding anything that indicated the presence of breeding birds in the vicinity we finally gave up the search. I afterward learned from Mr. Alfred Mears, of John's Pass, that formerly there had been a very considerable rookery at this point, which had suffered, as had the others of the region, from plume hunters, and had finally been totally abandoned by the hundreds of birds which once frequented this point. Giving up the search for the rookery here, I determined to go across Tampa Bay proper and examine three places where I had been six years before, in Old Tampa Bay, at each of which points all of the commoner Herons, Brown Pelicans, and Cormorants were then breeding by hundreds.

The first of these rookeries was at a place known as Papy's Bayou, and we reached here late in the afternoon, but though I looked the once familiar ground over carefully, I found only a few Green Herons breeding, and at dusk perhaps twenty American Egrets came in to roost. We remained at anchor near here all night, and the scarcity of birds was as marked as at any point we had so far visited.

Tuesday, June 1. To-day was spent in visiting the other two places where I had once seen birds so abundant. One of these points is known as the Double Branches, and the other as Rocky Creek. Formerly I had seen birds breeding here in great numbers, and Reddish Egrets had been the most conspicuous feature of these breeding grounds in those days. But now how different! Not a single pair of birds of any kind did I find nesting, and only at rare intervals were any kind of Herons to be observed. Not a single Brown Pelican or Cormorant was seen, though a little island at Rocky Creek had once been the nesting ground of many hundred of each species. Not a Reddish Egret and only a few frightened and wary Louisiana Herons were seen, and these were not breeding. At one point a flock of Roseate Spoonbills were feeding on a sandbar, but we did not get nearer than a quarter of a mile to them. Formerly I had seen many hundreds of these birds feeding and roosting in the vicinity of these rookeries, and they were then so tame and fearless that one could approach so as almost to touch the birds. Late in the day I determined to go to the town of Pinellas, which is on old Tampa

Bay, to learn anything I could from the people there in regard to the birds of the region. We reached the town about half-past five, and though all that I could get in the way of information was negative in character, yet I saw many flat skins of Florida Cormorants in one man's possession, and when I told him of the Rosy Spoonbills I had seen that morning, he would hardly believe me, as the birds had not been seen in the neighborhood for a couple of years.

Wednesday, June 2. Leaving the little town of Pinellas early this morning we rounded Point Pinellas, and again were cruising northward in the direction of Tarpon Springs. About three miles from the extreme end of Point Pinellas, in Boga Siega Bay, is the group of islands that once formed what is known as Maximo Rookery. These islands are so close together, being only divided by shoal and narrow streams of salt water at high tide, that practically they form a single low island. This is at least two hundred acres in extent, and is covered with a dense growth of the several kinds of mangrove and forms a point particularly attractive to birds either as a roosting or breeding place. I had been here six years before, and it fairly teemed with bird life then. Every tree and bush on this large area contained at least one nest, and many contained from two to six or eight nests whenever the size of the tree permitted. A perfect cloud of birds were always to be seen hovering over the island in the spring and early summer months, and conspicuous among them were Brown Pelicans, Man-o'-war Birds, Reddish Egrets, Florida Cormorants, Louisiana Herons, American Egrets, Snowy Herons, Little Blue Herons, Great Blue Herons, and both kinds of Night Herons. I have tried to give them in the order of their abundance, though it is difficult to say, in such an immense congregation, which species predominated. Beside, in comparatively smaller numbers, and yet by hundreds, were White Ibises and Rosy Spoonbills. So far as I was then able to determine, all these species bred here save the Roseate Spoonbill and Man-o'-war bird, the latter being present to prey on the Pelicans and Cormorants, taking from them, whenever possible, the food intended for the young birds. It was truly a wonderful sight, and I have never seen so many thousands of large birds together at any single point.

We anchored the sloop just off the island and I went ashore

to see what birds I might find. From the water, as we approached, only a few Cormorants were to be seen, possibly seventy-five in all, and though I spent several hours looking over the various parts of the island I found no other large birds breeding—absolutely not a single pair of Herons of any kind; five or six Louisiana Herons feeding on a small sand flat at one of the extremities of the island were all the Herons observed in the vicinity.

When I previously visited this point A. Lechevallier had located on the mainland about three-quarters of a mile away; here he had built a house and was killing birds on the island for the feather market. He or his assistants had then been there a little over a year, and I am told by persons living near, whom I have every reason to believe, that it took these men *five* breeding seasons to break up, by killing and frightening the birds away, this once incomparable breeding resort. Of course there were other plume hunters who aided in the slaughter, but the old Frenchman and his assistants are mainly responsible for the wanton destruction. He regarded this as his particular preserve, and went so far as to order outsiders, who came to kill Herons and other birds, off the ground. The rookery being destroyed, he had now given up his residence here.

In the afternoon we went on to John's Pass and stayed there for the night. A few pairs of Snowy Herons and quite a number of Louisiana Herons were breeding at the little rookery spoken of in the first paper of this series, the young birds being from a few days to a week or more old.

I learned from Alfred Mears, that J. H. Batty had only just left here, he having killed many birds on the beaches, and quite a number at this rookery, and that he had offered to buy Heron's plumes, at stated prices each, from any of the residents who would collect for him.

Thursday, June 3. To-day I spent on the beach to the south of the pass, where I found all the Terns before enumerated in great numbers, particularly *Hydrochelidon nigra surinamensis* and *Sterna sandvicensis acuflavida*. Of this latter species I collected a fine series of some sixty birds, and took a few specimens, for comparison, of each of the other kinds. I hope at some future time to discuss the conditions of plumage of the species obtained this day in detail.

Beside the Terns, all of the species of beach birds spoken of at Little Gasparilla and Casey's Passes were observed here, migrating north in small flocks, but the aggregate would mount up to large numbers; and I can not but confess my surprise at this flight, so late in the season, of species that breed so very far north.

I met at this point a Mr. Edward Curry, whose post office address is Bonifacio, Hillsboro County, Florida, who confirmed very fully all that I had ascertained in regard to the destruction of birds during the breeding season on this coast.

Friday, June 4—Sunday, June 6. After leaving this pass on Friday our journey back to Tarpon Springs was uneventful, and I have fully discussed the ground we went over in the first paper of this series. We reached Tarpon Springs early on Sunday morning. As a result of this five weeks' cruise I had collected in all about two hundred and fifty birds, which have already been spoken of in detail.

At Tarpon Springs I learned that J. H. Batty was at Trouble Creek, a point six miles north of here, and later the men who had killed birds for him there, told me that he bought all the birds they could kill for him, except White Ibises. These included the more common of the smaller land birds, which were apparently as desirable as the water species. He took all Hawks and Owls, and also the Florida Quail. The prices paid for these birds in the flesh ranged from ten cents up to as high as seventy-five cents, and even a dollar for some kinds, such as the Great Blue Heron.

The facts I have presented in these papers have been mainly derived from my personal observation, and I have carefully avoided giving any information supplied from outside sources unless I felt sure that it was to be relied upon.

It is scarcely necessary to draw any conclusions or inferences. This great and growing evil speaks for itself. I have the name and addresses of some fifty dealers in various towns in Florida and the principal cities of the country. Merchants in New York and other centres are buying every month the skins and plumes of Florida birds. The price paid for such material, notwithstanding the efforts made to create sympathy for the birds, and a feeling against using the feathers for hats and other decorative purposes,

is each year becoming higher, showing how great is the demand and how profitable the traffic is to these men-milliners.

[ERRATA.—The first two papers of this series were published without the author being able to revise the proofs. He now sends the following list of errata:

Page 138,	line 24	for Boya Sieya	read Boga Siega.
" 138,	" 28	" Lechvallier	" Lechevallier.
" 213,	"	" Nyakka	" Myiakka.
" 215,	" 6	" Rossa	" Rassa.
" 216,	lines 7, 24, 40	for Rossa	" "
" 221,	" 17, 20, 23, 25, 29, 35	for Rossa	" "
" 221,	" 29	for we	" he.
" 221,	" 27,	" Myakka	" Myiakka.
" 222,	" 6	" "	" "

Also in the Paper entitled 'Some Rare Florida Birds,' *Punta Rossa* on pages 133 and 134 should read *Punta Rassa*.—EDD.]

THE PINE FINCH (*SPINUS PINUS*) BREEDING AT CORNWALL-ON-HUDSON, N. Y.

BY J. A. ALLEN.

ON April 20, 1887, I went to Cornwall-on-Hudson, Orange Co., N. Y., where I remained till May 12, making my home at the residence of Mr. Daniel Taft. The house is in the midst of a lawn of several acres in extent, well set with fruit and shade trees, overlooking the Hudson.

On the day of my arrival a small flock of Pine Finches, busily hunting food in the pines and spruces, attracted my attention, but as the season was late and the weather still cold it was not, of course, a noteworthy occurrence. They continued to haunt the vicinity for several days, when all disappeared except a single pair. On the morning of May 3, I was surprised to see one of the birds gathering material for a nest. She was easily traced to the lower branch of a Norway pine, scarcely thirty feet from the piazza, and almost within reach of a little summer house overrun with a wisteria vine. The site chosen for the nest was the extremity of the branch, about eight or ten feet from the ground, and well concealed. Several times the little builder carried material to the nest while I was sitting in the arbor, almost within reach of it. Although I afterward carefully kept away, the birds seemed not fully satisfied with the exposed situ-